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*John G. Talbot*  
The Ministration of Angels. .  
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A SERMON

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## A Sermon, &c.

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MATTHEW x. 10.

“THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.”

IT would not be true to say of the aggregate of professing Christians that they actually deny the reality of angelic ministrations, but we submit to you, as a truth which can hardly be too much deplored, that they live in comparative forgetfulness of such ministrations being definitely set forward in our Holy Scriptures. Now, not only is there the shutting up of a wide avenue of godly consolation in putting out of mind the statements of the Bible as to the active offices of good angels, but there is a positive opening of a ready channel for mischief in the removal from our thoughts of the energetic exertions of the evil angels, under their sovereign potentate, struggling to grasp our souls, and to make them fellow-heirs with them of eternal perdition. The doctrine of the activities of the good angels, in behalf of man's welfare, is so intertwined with the doctrine of the activities of the evil, in the direction of his utter woe, that whosoever heeds not the comfort of the one must be in imminent peril of being inextricably involved in the meshes of the other.

Well, then, may we believe that the doctrine of the ministrations of angels of mercy, and the machina-

tions of angels of mischief, does not obtain its proper share of regard. It is a misfortune that it should practically be held a fanciful thing and a speculative, if not a fanatical thing and a foolish, to demand the attention of our congregations to the functions of invisible intelligences; and so it is a subject of real congratulation that the Church, fearing no ridicule, dauntless in asserting verity, and having no object but man's true interest, makes a special point of setting up what her carnal sons are disposed to overturn. She deems it well to blow her annual trumpets, and to proclaim her yearly festival on which her appointed services may ring with the memories of blessings wrought by angels, on which her prayers may supplicate for the benefits of "succour and defence" conferred through angels, and on which it may be brought home to a man's intelligence, if it cannot be forced upon his heart, that his destiny, for weal or woe, is to be administered by angels.

Something of the measure of the neglect in pondering on the beings who make up the thronging numbers of God's paradise above may perchance be understood if we will but consider with what careless, thoughtless minds are breathed forth the repetitions of the entreaty in our Lord's complete and beautiful summation of all prayer. Continually does the petition come forth from lips wearing the semblance of devotion, even from those who know that they ought to be praying both with the spirit and the understanding; but do you, as perpetually you allow the syllables in accustomed form to pass the outlet of your lips, duly consider how much is involved? Do



you take it to your heart what verily is implied in your kneeling before God's throne, and generally for the world at large, and emphatically for your very self, addressing the Almighty, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven?"

"As in heaven." Why, this one solitary Scripture breathed forth by Christ, sanctified and for ever consecrated by the divine source from whence it springs, this alone is more than enough to shew us how great is the folly, and how closely the sin verges upon hypocrisy, when you presume to employ language which your Saviour has bidden you, and yet are not careful to learn or scrupulous to treasure what is placed within your reach of knowledge concerning the nature, the offices, the duties, the obedience of those, to attain unto the measure of whose devotedness to the Eternal you profess by your very sentences to be the summit of your hopes, the loftiest of your aims.

Very manifold, you should be aware, are the references throughout the Bible to those blessed existences which fill the palaces above. Indeed, we find the angels far from uniformly mixed up with obscure things, not generally concerned with things surpassing comprehension, or exceeding ordinary faith. They are found associated with the most precious of Bible promises, and conspicuous in the most cherished Bible scenes. Many and many a Christian, we doubt not, has drawn goodly comfort as he has owned rich sympathy with the Psalmist commemorating the mercy of Jehovah, "Because thou hast made the Lord thy refuge, and the Most High thy habitation, there shall

no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling;" yet how few perchance, even of those who have derived the richest solace from the strain, have dwelt with proportioned thought upon the lines which follow, exhibiting by what means the deliverance is accomplished, by what instrumentality the mercy is wrought,—“For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.”

There is one reason, and but one, why there can ever be a pretence for justifying anything like a deliberate disregard to these messengers of God. This consists in the fear that we should be led to hold them in undue reverence, and to pay them such homage as alone is due to God, the great and holy Spirit. We ascribe to the Holy Ghost alone the attribute of being “the Comforter.” In the Holy Ghost alone we would recognise the power of implanting divine life, outpouring divine influence, overspreading divine hope; but thus giving to God the Spirit the undivided worship which is the Spirit’s due, it will not be derogatory to the Spirit; in the words of a departed bishop, “It will not infringe on the office of the Holy Ghost to suppose that good angels may and often do, as instruments of the divine goodness, operate upon our minds so as to prompt us to pious affections, thoughts, and actions.” Once guarded from the danger of desiring to worship, we are subject to the duty charged upon us by Christ Himself, of being studious to imitate. St. John, in Patmos, was moved to make the offer of worship to the angel of revelation, but the reply of the angel lives on to the end of time, speaks in the name of

the troops of heaven to ourselves, and says, "See thou do it not, . . . worship God."

Mystery, of course, will ever surround what is unseen. The entirely spiritual evades the grasp of the carnal. The veil of mystery, however, is not altogether impenetrable, the dimness not utterly inscrutable. Scripture propounds some decisive information concerning angels; it testifies alike to the strength and the multitudes of this order of creation. "Bless the Lord, ye His angels who excel in strength," such is the rhapsody of the Psalmist, whilst he affirms of their numbers that they crowd up into myriads: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels, and the Lord is among them." Gifted they are besides with the splendid endowment of immortality; in them the seeds of corruption have never been planted, so that when our Lord would make men understand that the children of the resurrection should arise to an imperishable and everlasting life, He said, "Neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels." Thus mighty, thus countless, thus immortal, are the tenants of the heavenly courts. Moreover, it is the added testimony of the unerring Word that they are "all ministering spirits, sent to minister to the heirs of salvation;" and here, here is the theme on which the Church of Christ makes holiday. She keeps her eye of adoration fixed on the Crucified, the Risen, the Divine, but meanwhile she is conscious of the willing aid in the full achievement and effectual working out of the great salvation which is lent by the unnumbered ranks of the spirits who never fell. From first to last their interest is ever

keen. At the creation it was "Glory to God;" at the incarnation it was "Glory to God in the highest:" just because they beheld God's glory most in the marvellous work of men's redemption, they were then inflamed to raise their more rapturous song.

We read of Moses of old breathing forth his ardent prayer, "Lord, I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory;" and the Lord in answer said, "I will make My goodness to pass before thee," indicating plainly that the dazzling heights of His glory were founded in the amazing depths of His mercy. And in like manner, what else can we conceive of the seraphim and cherubim above, but that they are ever burning with the eager promptings of the prayer, "Lord, shew us Thy glory?" And when the Eternal replies, "I will make My goodness to pass before you," and shews them the bleeding Lamb, and the vanquished grave, and the ransomed souls, they feel indeed that verily goodness is glory; and so they sweep their harps with yet richer melody, and break forth in still more fervent praise.

Long were the attempt to register, hard the task to reckon up, all that has been wrought on earth by the agency of these ministers of the Highest. When do we not hear of them as busied in the welfare of the saints? In what association are they not ever to be found? Would not patience be exhausted sooner than material were we to enumerate a fraction of the chronicles which reveal how God has been pleased to accomplish His purposes by the direct employment of this tenantry of the upper world. Patriarchs, prophets, apostles, those are rare which have not been

delivered, been comforted, been guided, and been taught by angels. Shielded often from actual vision, and yet not always so, we may know that they are unwearied and unwearying in their embassies of loving-kindness. The witness of God Himself is their glorious testimony, and we must therefore hold that no doctrine is more clearly laid down in Holy Writ, and, being laid down, scarce any should be more precious, than that good angels are employed in waiting and watching for the righteous. These in their holy zeal we are bound to imitate; these in their beautiful obedience we are called to follow; to them pursuing their high vocation, and burning with their celestial adoration, should we be uplifted in a rapt and reverent contemplation, as often as we venture to come as suppliants to the God of angels and of men, and ask, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

But this our service, while it exalts our estimate of angelic enterprise and presents us with the model of angelic purity, somewhat startles us when it exhibits that there has been a time and there is a sense in which the will of the Father has been challenged even in the realms of light,—a time when this will was sought to be violated even by the superior spirits with which He had surrounded Himself in the supremacy of His glory.

Without preface, without preparation, there breaks in abruptly upon the proceedings of our sanctuary the astounding announcement that "there was war in heaven." It is the largest of contradictions, it is the vastest of paradoxes, that heaven—the essential home of peace, the palace of unsullied love—should become



the scene of conflict and the arena of contending armaments. But surpassing man's conjecture, and yet demanding man's faith, it stands recorded that there *was*,—"there was war in heaven."

I presume not to picture the details ; I venture not, in God's house, to follow out the glowing portraitures of Milton's fancy, nor to depict how the legions of rebellious seraphim coped in vain with the battalions, still loyal to Jehovah, who owned Michael for their captain.

Without trespassing, however, into regions belonging to poetry and human imagination, there is enough intimated in the ungarnished statements of inspired revelation to circle with mighty interest and to invest with peculiar warning the declaration of what was enacted when there was "war in heaven."

In double aspect may this statement, thus strangely thrust upon us, be surveyed. It may be regarded in its historic verity, or it may be read in its prophetic interpretation. In the first, (its historic verity,) it chronicles the apostacy of Satan ; in the second, (its prophetic character,) it is exponent of the Church's experience. In each alike it is shrouded with mystery : but what signifies the rolling over of those clouds of obscurity ? Our sense of hearing is not closed. What though the vision be perplexed ? The ear may still, through all the confusions of overhanging mist, discern the shout of victory. We may know that all along this is the cry of victory,—an *Epinikion* which publishes the glorious tidings of a battle fought and a battle won.

Now, as to the *first* aspect in which this Michaelmas

celebration tells of the victory here achieved by the angels who do God's will, we find enunciation of the consolatory truth that the struggle of the Evil One for eminence and power in heaven was a final struggle,—“His place therein was found no more:” so that the striving against the might of the Omnipotent is never to be renewed. They whose portions shall be in the presence of God for evermore, are warranted beforehand in their goodly expectation of being free there from the wiles of an adversary who here is an antagonist of such restless and lamentable energy.

As matter, too, of deep and true theology, another intimation of this Apocalypse is the elevated teaching, that it was none other than the death of the Son of God by which the arch-fiend was expelled from the upper sanctuary. How mysteriously the Atonement spread out its influence to give the hosts of heaven their victory over the uprising ranks of the apostates,—how it became an apparatus by which the engines of rebel mischiefs should be silenced,—*how*, (we say,) we know not; but we are taught (even by the simple telling that so it was) to uplift our Lord with still higher exaltation; to behold that His energies for averting evil reach higher than to the families of men; to know that that Atonement scattered the blessings of deliverance even amongst the angelic hosts. The tenants of the eternal homes, fired with no other than the desire to do God's will, thus appear to be partakers of the benefit as well as helpers in the work of the Redeemer's mission: inasmuch as it is said that in the original convulsion of the revolutionized heaven, they owed their mastery not to their prowess, not to

their strength, but “they overcame by the blood of the Lamb.”

But the gain of the spirits in joy was, for a while, the trial of the created world beneath. “Rejoice, ye heavens, but woe to the earth;” this the up-sent cry, as the prince of this world is banished from the brighter world above. Here, for a time, he concentrates all his permitted powers to thwart the designs of Almighty mercy; and *here*, we have apparent reason for believing, is limited his faculty of evil. Since the curse in Paradise, the tempter, perchance, has not been free to traverse the far-off spheres, or expatiate over boundless tracks, but here on earth is a prisoner, here is condemned to comparative confinement; and in the bitterness of superhuman wrath employs the interval, “the short time” that is permitted him,—even the time of man’s probation,—to make vassals of those who, by accepting Christ’s work and by working God’s will, are eligible to share in God’s presence all the transcendent glories of the conquering Christ.

However, to the second view. This prevalence of the obedient angels to effect the banishment of Satan is to be regarded, as it has been evidently appropriated by St. John, as being in itself a figure of the triumph of Christianity in the world. Herein does the vision become a prophecy. Thus does it grow eloquent with the tidings that the kingdom of God, by the instrumentality of the saints who do God’s will, shall surely overcome all resistances and be established, in spite of the utmost of diabolical strivings. It appears to me to be *yet* equally vain and vague to endeavour to assign special dates for the fulfilment of the



prophecy, to set down special incidents as verification of the figure. It may be that the commentators are right who behold in the "war in heaven" a scenic depicting of the struggles of infant Christianity against the opposition of imperial Rome intent upon its suppression. It may be when Constantine became a convert to the Cross, and by national decree prohibited the public recognition of idolatry by the State, that the Evil One might be said to be foiled and to depart in wrath. It may be, again, that there is allusion to the abominations of papal Rome and the destined demolition of its power. I deny it not; but yet rather I glory in discriminating a wider range for the splendid prediction. It seems not so much a particular, as a perpetual prophecy. It extends wider than the Roman government; it endures longer than the Church's infancy. It is a fixed possession, a permanent rally-point for the Church of Christ; the finest of encouragements to be resolute in doing our Master's will. Just as often as Christianity becomes effectual in any clime, or in any age, to demolish the altars of paganism or efface the miseries of superstition, so often is there a fresh driving back of the Evil One from his strongholds; so often is there a new victory in the on-going conflict with the powers of darkness. Every fresh establishment of a station whence the knowledge of Christ may be disseminated, is a renewed stimulus to the Spirit of mischief to accelerate his measures and augment his activity. This, at its every repetition, is a separate (though imperfect) verifying of the vision of the "war in heaven," which shall go on, again and again, in re-

iterated number, till the last efforts of the devil are demonstrated to be fruitless. Then shall ensue the final and utter crushing of the master Spirit of evil and of his associated legions. Then, immediately, the evangelized earth shall be ready to fulfil to the letter the foreshewings of the vision. Then shall dawn upon the peoples of the world the day of general thanksgiving of nations, no longer rivals in aught but righteousness; then shall earth's confines re-echo with the exultations of victory till the East shall chant for joy unto the West, and one pole shall shout in ecstacy to another, that "now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down."

Whilst, however, we are led somewhat away from our original topic to expatiate upon the angelic conflict which is immortalized in this day's epistle, let us return to it for a practical lesson, a parting and a plain. Let us only remember that it is the will of God as accomplished heartily in the unity of heaven above, and not as slowly developed amidst the distractions of the kingdom of God below, that we are bound to seek to fulfil.

God's will; and "as in heaven." Having our conversation in heaven, we should rise above the enticements of these lower scenes, and seek to perform our earthly duties with a heavenly eye.

"As it is in heaven." It is the teaching of the great Teacher: it is the inspiration of the pre-eminently Inspired. O, ye would do well to ponder on

the sublimeness of the pattern which hereby is set before you. What a contrast between the obedience, quick and ready, of the angels ; and the obedience, cold and sluggish, of the best of men ! To be perfectly obedient even as the troops of Zion exhibit obedience, this has been your prayer ; but have ye yet attained to this submission of your will to your Maker's ? Have ye yet risen to angelic serving of your glorious King ? Ah, no : your own will has risen in rebellion ; your own inconsistencies have vitiated your highest purposes of piety.

But though ye have not yet attained to the fulfilment of your own petitions, be ye not dispirited ; rather be ye animated by angels' high achievements. Pray on ; the time cometh when obedience, even as angels', may be rendered by you ; and happiness, even as angels', may be shared by you.

But those amongst you who will not strive, but are content to repeat this petition day by day with little of sincerity and nothing of warmth, you who desire no communion with good angels, and dread no contamination from evil, we warn you that unless ye gird yourselves in the Spirit's power to follow the angels' pattern, and to do deeds worthy of your calling, of which angels might not be ashamed, ye have to dread hereafter a portion with the hypocrites. God is a God too righteous to allow to pass unpunished the guilt of asking with the lips to be made like angels, while you are pondering with your hearts intent on doing works of carnal selfishness.

You will do well, then, not to be neglectful of Scripture teachings about angels now. In the coming

hereafter angels have their tasks assigned. If men understand not the offices of angels now, they will comprehend *then*. Angels shall erect the throne; angels in myriads shall escort the Judge; angels shall reap the earth; angels shall bring the harvest home; angels shall bind the ungodly for the burning; angels shall proclaim the recorded guilt; angels recal the forgotten sins; angels shall attend the last great jubilee; angels throng the pavilion of undying praise. O, then it will be much, it will be well-nigh everything, to have aimed at an angel's holiness on earth! It will be well for those who have sought to do for Christ what Christ has bidden, and who have longed for obedience, pure and perfect, even as that for which they are taught to pray, nay which they teach themselves, as often as they bow the knee, and say, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

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